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The Practice of Survey Research Theory and Applications: A Review

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Abstract

The Practice of Survey Research: Theory and Applications is a practical text written for the beginning researcher at either the graduate or undergraduate level. This text not only includes the foundation of key concepts and theories of survey research, but is also a practical framework for the researcher. It bridges the gap between the survey tool and quantitative analysis.

Keywords

Survey Research, Quantitative Analysis, Questionnaire Design

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The Practice of Survey Research Theory and Applications: A Review

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The Practice of Survey Research: Theory and Applications is a practical text written for the beginning researcher at either the graduate or undergraduate level. This text not only includes the foundation of key concepts and theories of survey research, but is also a practical framework for the researcher. It bridges the gap between the survey tool and quantitative analysis. Keywords: Survey Research, Quantitative Analysis, Questionnaire Design

The Practice of Survey Research: Theory and Applications (Ruel, Wagner, & Gillespie, 2016) is a book that is based in sociological research and was written to provide examples for graduate and undergraduate students alike. The purpose of the book was to “create a comprehensive survey research book that incorporates survey design, survey implementation, data management, and data analysis” (Ruel, Wagner, & Gillespie, 2016, p. 15). With the belief that research ethics have an overall importance, the book also includes an “ethics corner” in multiple chapters, and provides practical issues specific to the chapter topic. The book is 338 pages and has a total of 15 chapters. The chapters are divided into four sections. Section 1, entitled, “Decisions to Make before Conducting the Survey,” is covered in Chapter 1. This section introduces the basic concepts of survey research and includes application examples, a description of various technologies to administer the survey, and key decisions that need to be made in advance. Section 2 is “Questionnaire Design” and is covered in Chapters 2-6. This section covers developing the survey tool, and shares the importance of proper question construction and determining reliability and validity with the data. The importance of having a quality cover letter and of piloting the survey is addressed in this section as well. Section 3 is “Implementing a Survey”, and Chapters 7-11 cover this topic. It covers topics such as appropriate sampling techniques, the data collection process, and the need for appropriate response rates, and formulas to calculate this. Section 4 is the final section and covers “Postsurvey Data Management and Analysis.” This section gets into the final piece of the survey, that is, performing the data entry and “cleaning” of the data. Various analysis methods are shared in this section as well.

The book (Ruel, Wagner, & Gillespie, 2016) takes the reader on a thorough tour of survey research, starting with definitions, moving to the creation of the survey, and analyzing the data collected. I found the book to have practical examples throughout, such as starting the survey with the most engaging questions in order to help the respondent feel comfortable, and place the questions dealing with sensitive or private issues in the middle of the survey. Another example is to not directly correct the data, as then there is no record of the change, but instead to use syntax as a record is made each time a change occurs and if an error is found during analysis, it can be easily fixed. Other practical hints are shared throughout the book. At the end of various chapters, a checklist is provided in order to help one accomplish the objective from that chapter. Throughout the book, key terms are bolded and in blue font in order to catch your eye, and are listed in the name index as the final part of the book. There are mini-case study examples throughout the book that help the reader take information and apply it in a real world example. At the end of the book, the Epilogue lays out an easy to follow step-by-step approach to the eight main areas of creating a valid survey.

An area that could be improved upon in future releases is the lack of a “cheat sheet” for types of surveys, sorted by the type of information the reader is looking for. Also, although reliability and validity are discussed, there is no specific formula given for the exact number needed for confidence level and margin of error. There are many online tools available, such as SurveyMonkey, which offer this service for free and would have been appropriate to include in the book.

When searching for a book on survey research, there are very few options; the options I have found typically fall into two different categories. One category is the type that is philosophically driven and is written at such a high level that it makes it difficult for a typical student to find any use in it. The other type is one that is more of a cookie-cutter type book; anyone can read it, but it doesn't allow the reader to move beyond the examples shared in the book. I was pleased that *The Practice of Survey Research: Theory and Applications* (Ruel, Wagner, & Gillespie, 2016) did not fall into either of those categories. I am currently in a doctoral program and have already taken a class on developing a survey for my dissertation. The professor that taught the class did not require a book for us to purchase because he was not able to find one comprehensive enough for our class. Instead, he substituted various articles and parts of books for us to read. This particular book bridged the gap between developing a quality survey tool and performing an accurate quantitative analysis, and would be an excellent resource for any research class at the graduate level. It shows that research and analysis are not separate, but instead need to work together. I plan to keep this book on my bookshelf, ready to use it as I move forward with developing my final survey and collecting results for my dissertation.

References

Ruel, E., Wagner, W. E., III, & Gillespie, B. J. (2016). *The practice of survey research: Theory and applications*. London, UK: Sage

Author Note

Mr. Nelson is currently in his third year of the Doctoral Program at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, WI. He earned his Master's in Education from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and his Bachelor of Science degree from University of Northwestern - St. Paul. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: jeffnelson71@gmail.com.

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